Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014

# Message Text

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ORIGIN AF-10

INFO OCT-02 ISO-00 AID-05 USIA-15 SP-02 L-03 IGA-02
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NSC-05 PA-02 PRS-01 SS-15 OES-07 AGRE-00 HEW-06
IO-14 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /111 R

DRAFTED BY AF/W:EESVENDSEN:GAR
APPROVED BY AF/W:TWMSMITH
AID/ARF/CAWA:FSCORDATO
AF/P:BRUSSELL
USIA:DSHAW (SUBS)
----------017727 260229Z /41
P 260002Z JAN 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY ACCRA PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652:N/A

TAGS: EAID, GH

SUBJECT: OTTAWAY ON EMERGENCY FOOD DISTRIBUTION

1. UNDER THE HEADLINE, "GHANA SAYS CRACKDOWN WILL END AID CORRUPTION," THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE BY DAVID B. OTTAWAY WAS PUBLISHED JANUARY 25 IN THE WASHINGTON POST. TEXT FOLLOWS: QUOTE:TAMALE, GHANA -- A SEVERE DROUGHT IN THIS AREA LAST SUMMER LED TO SUCH CORRUPTION IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF EMERGENCY FOOD SUPPLIES THAT AT ONE POINT THE UNITED STATES, A MAJOR DONOR OF GRAIN, SUSPENDED ITS AID.
THE DROUGHT IS NOW OVER, AND GHANA'S MILITARY GOVERNMENT SAYS IT IS TAKING STEPS TO PREVENT FUTURE INTERNATIONAL SCANDALS OVER ITS HANDLING OF RELIEF OPERATIONS.

A NATIONAL FOOD STOCKPILE HAS BEEN CREATED, SOME OFFICIALS
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INVOLVED IN THE SCANDAL HAVE BEEN FIRED AND A NETWORK OF DROUGHT RELIEF COMMITTEES HAS BEEN CREATED TO HANDLE ANY NEW EMERGENCIES.

"YOU CAN REST ASSURED THAT THERE WILL NOT BE A REPETITION OF THAT,"SAID GEN. KUTU ACHEAMPONG, GHANA'S CHIEF OF STATE, REFERRING TO THE FOOD CRISIS AT A PRESS CONFERENCE

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IN ACCRA, THE CAPITAL EARLIER THIS MONTH.

THE CORRUPTION IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF EMERGENCY FOOD, ACCORDING TO MANY PERSONS IN THIS AREA, CONTRIBUTED TO THE DEATH OF SOME SEVERELY UNDERFED GHANAIANS. THE SALE OF FREE GRAIN PROVIDED BY THE UNITED STATES, CANADA AND VARIOUS EUROPEAN COUNTRIES WAS BLATANT AND WIDESPREAD.

"EVERYONE WITH A CAR AND A BUNGALOW GOT SOME OF IT" REMARKED A CATHOLIC PRIEST HERE IN TAMALE, CAPITAL OF THE NORTHERN REGION WHERE THE DROUGHT HAS NOW EASED AND MARKETS ARE FULL OF RICE, CORN AND YAMS FROM THE LATEST HARVEST.

GHANA RECEIVED ABOUT 93,000 TONS OF EMERGENCY GRAIN RELIEF LAST YEAR WHILE BUYING ANOTHER 290,000. THE UNITED STATES GAVE ABOUT 15,000 TONS OF SORGHUM BUT 2,500 TONS OF IT WAS PUT INTO A WAREHOUSE HERE AFTER THE ILLEGAL SALE OF NEARLY ANOTHER 1,500 TONS.

THE DROUGHT ACROSS NORTHERN GHANA, BEGAN THREE YEARS AGO, BUT DID NOT REACH A CRISIS UNTIL LAST SUMMER. JUST HOW SERIOUS THE SITUATION BECAME REMAINS A SUBJECT OF MUCH DISPUTE.

GEN. ACHEAMPONG SAID AT HIS PRESS CONFERENCE THAT IT WAS UNCLASSIFIED



"ABSOLUTELY WRONG" THAT THERE HAD EVER BEEN A "FAMINE" RESULTING IN PEOPLE "DYING IN THE STREETS," AS WAS REPORTED ABROAD. HE SAID THERE HAD ONLY BEEN A "SHORTAGE OF FOOD" AND THE GOVERNMENT HAD ACTED TO AVERT A REAL FAMINE BY OBTAINING LARGE AMOUNTS OF GRAIN ABROAD AT MUCH EXPENSE.

"IT ISN'T TRUE PEOPLE DIED FROM DISEASES COMING FROM FAMINE," ADDED LT. COL. L. K. KODJIKI, COMMISSIONER OF THE NORTHERN REGION HERE.

BUT CATHOLIC CHURCH SOURCES AND INDIVIDUAL GHANAIANS SAY SCORES DID SUCCUMB TO SUCH DISEASES, PARTICULARLY IN THE FAR NORTHERN UPPER REGION BORDERING ON UPPER VOLTA. ONE YOUTH FROM THE VILLAGE OF BAWKU ESTIMATED 10 TO 15 PERSONS HAD DIED IN HIS AREA ALONE. BUT HE WAS UNABLE TO SAY WHETHER THEIR DEATHS WERE THE RESULT OF OUTRIGHT STARVATION OR FAMINE-RELATED DISEASES.

COMPARED TO THE THOUSANDS OF DEATHS AT THE HEIGHT OF THE DROUGHT IN THE SAHEL COUNTRIES IN 1973-74, OR TENS OF THOUSANDS WHO PERISHED FROM FAMINE IN ETHIOPIA, THE

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SITUATION HERE APPEARS LESS SERIOUS. NO ONE, NOT EVEN THE HIGHLY CRITICAL CATHOLIC PRIEST HERE IN TAMALE, WAS ABLE TO CONFIRM ANY DEATHS DIRECTLY FROM STARVATION.

THUS THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT'S CONTENTION THAT THE WESTERN PRESS HAS "EXAGGERATED" THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE DROUGHT IN THE NORTH SEEMS LARGELY TRUE, ALTHOUGH ITS ASSERTION THAT THERE WERE NO DEATHS EVEN FROM DISEASES TRACEABLE TO MALNUTRITION ALSO APPEARS UNTRUE.

THE PICTURE THAT EMERGES IS OF SCATTERED POCKETS OF SEVERE DROUGHT LEADING TO LOCALIZED FAMINE CONDITIONS IN THE TWO NORTHERNMOST REGIONS, WHERE ABOUT A MILLION OF GHANA'S 10 MILLION PEOPLE LIVE. IT IS UNKNOWN HOW
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MANY WERE AFFECTED.

THE RAINS WERE BETTER THIS PAST FALL IN THE NORTHERN REGION AND THE HARVESTING OF WHAT IS REPORTED TO BE A VERY GOOD RICE CROP IS NEARLY COMPLETE. BUT THE UPPER REGION IS STILL SUFFERING FROM LOW RAINFALL. THUS THERE IS STILL CONCERN HERE IN NONGOVERNMENTAL CIRCLES THAT DISASTER COULD BEFALL THE NORTH THIS SPRING.

WITH NO PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE IN DROUGHT RELIEF OPERATIONS, THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT PROBABLY ACTED FAR TOO SLOW LAST SUMMER AND THEN BECAME EXTREMELY SENSITIVE TO CRITICISM AT HOME AND ABROAD. IN ADDITION, THE CRISIS IN THE NORTH HIT JUST AS GEN. ACHEAMPONG WAS FACING HIS MOST SERIOUS CHALLENGE YET FROM CIVILIAN OPPOSITION GROUPS THAT SEIZED ON THE ISSUE TO DISCREDIT HIM.

THE REAL SCANDAL, HOWEVER, WAS THE PUBLIC PLUNDERING OF THE RELIEF FOOD THEN FLOWING INTO THE COUNTRY. NO GHANAIAN OFFICIAL DENIES NOW THAT EMBEZZLEMENT AND SALE OF THE FREE GRAIN WERE RIFE.

LT. COL. KODJIKU, WHO HAS JUST BEEN APPOINTED REGIONAL COMMISSIONER IN A SHAKEUP, BLAMED THIS CORRUPTION ON IGNORANCE OF HOW TO SET UP A DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM. "IT WAS THE FIRST TIME IN GHANA'S HISTORY THERE WAS A RELIEF PROGRAM," HE SAID.

AT THE LOCAL LEVEL, HE ACCUSED THE TRADITIONAL TRIBAL CHIEFS OF SELLING RATHER THAN DISTRIBUTING THE EMERGENCY FOOD SUPPLIES.

"THE PARAMOUNT CHIEFS CAME IN AND ASKED FOR FOOD, SAYING
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THERE WAS DROUGHT IN THEIR AREAS. THEY EVEN CAME WITH THEIR OWN VEHICLES TO CARRY IT AWAY. THE ONLY THING TO DO WAS TO SUPPLY THE FOOD," HE SAID EXPLAINING THAT THE CHIEFS IN THE NORTH WERE AN EXTREMELY IMPORTANT PART OF THE ADMINISTRATION. "YOU JUST CANNOT DO ANYTHING WITHOUT THE CHIEFS."

HE ALSO SUGGESTED THAT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH WAS INVOLVED IN THE SCANDAL AND THAT PRIESTS HAD USED THE RELIEF FOOD TO PRESSURE GHANAIANS INTO BECOMING CATHOLICS. "FOOD WAS GIVEN OUT TO DISTRIBUTE TO SOME PEOPLE WHO SHOULDN'T HAVE HAD IT," HE SAID IN A SIDE REFERENCE TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, THE LEADING CRITIC OF THE GOVERNMENTS HANDLING OF THE DROUGHT.

THE CATHOLIC PRIEST HERE ADMITTED THE CHURCH HAD NO APPARATUS SET UP TO CARRY OUT THE FOOD DISTRIBUTION TASK AND THAT IT HAD BEEN DONE INFORMALLY. BUT HE SAID SEVERAL DISTRICT OFFICIALS HAD MADE OFF WITH THE FOOD AND SOLD IT, REQUIRING LOCAL PRIESTS TO TAKE OVER THE JOB OF GETTING MORE SUPPLIES AND DISTRIBUTING THEM.

ONE SUCH CASE, HE SAID, OCCURRED IN WALEWALE, 75 MILES NORTH OF HERE, WHERE THE CHIEF DISTRICT OFFICIALS ALLEGEDLY GOT HOLD OF 200 BAGS OF AMERICAN SORGHUM AND SOLD IT FOR ABOUT $6 A BOWL AT THE HEIGHT OF LAST SUMMER'S CRISIS.

UNDER PRODDING FROM THE U.S. EMBASSY, THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT DID FINALLY TAKE ACTION TO HALT THE EMBEZZLEMENT AND ILLEGAL SALE OF RELIEF FOOD. ROBERT GARDINER, GHANA'S PRESTIGIOUS ECONOMIST WHO HEADED THE U.N. ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA BEFORE RETURNING TO BECOME COMMISSIONER OF ECONOMIC PLANNING, BECAME PERSONALLY INVOLVED IN STAMPING OUT CORRUPTION AT THE SEAPORT OF TAKORADI.

WITH CREATION OF THE FOOD STOCKPILE AND NETWORK OF




RELIEF COMMITTEES, THE GOVERNMENT SAYS IT IS PREPARED FOR ANOTHER CRISIS. BUT WHETHER THE CORRUPTION SO PERVASIVE IN THE GOVERNMENT AND IN PRIVATE CIRCLES CAN BE KEPT OUT OF A NEW RELIEF OPERATION REMAINS TO BE SEEN.

2. SUBJECT ARTICLE WAS NOT RAISED AT THE NOON PRESS BRIEFING ON JANUARY 25.

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# Message Attributes

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